

The family, communal and civil, celebrated the great feast of Pascha in antiquity as a way life as it should be celebrated. This is seen from the remarkable, forceful, inspiring words of St. Gregory of Nyssa, said by him on this feast: "Today", said St. Gregory, "the entire universe, as one family, gathers for one purpose, having left their usual work, as if given a sign, turns to prayer. Today there are no travelers on the roads; no seafarers on the sea; the farmer, having left plough and spade, is dressed in festive clothes; the liquor stores stand empty, noisy markets disappear, as winter disappears with the coming of spring; the anxieties, the bustle, and the struggles of everyday life are replaced by the quiet of the feast. The poor are dressed like the rich; the rich are dressed even more superbly than usual; the old man, similarly to the young man, hastens to take part in the joy, and the ill person overcomes his illness; children, having changed clothes, celebrate sensually, because they cannot celebrate spiritually yet; the virgin rejoices with her whole heart because she sees the light of the solemn promise of her hope; the mother of the family, celebrating, rejoices with all her household, both she herself, and her husband, both children and servants and domestics, all rejoice. Like a newly formed swarm of bees, for the first time taking off from an apiary to light and air, all sit together on one branch of a tree, so on the present feast all members of families come from everywhere to gather in their homes. And it is really fair to compare the present day to the day of the future resurrection, because this and the other gather people; only then will all be going together, and now all are going separately. Whatever concerns the validity of joy and gladness one may say that the present day is more joyful than the future one: then by necessity those who are clothed in sin will cry; now, on the contrary, there is nothing sad among us. Now even the righteous man rejoices, and the unclean in his conscience hopes to be corrected by repentance. The present day eases all grief, and no man is so sad that he could not find consolation in the celebration of the feast. Today the captive is released; the debtor is forgiven his obligation; servants receive freedom under the good and philanthropic appeal of Church, not with dishonor and punishment. Wounds are not relieved by wounds, as happens during national feasts, where servants are exposed on a raised place in shame and humiliation receive their freedom, but are released in honor, as you yourself know, today even those remaining in slavery receive joy. Even if the servant committed many important offences, which may not be possible either to forgive or to excuse; even then his master out of respect for the day, basking in joy and humaneness, accepts the reprobate and the humiliated one, like the Pharaoh who released the cupbearer from prison. For he knows that on the day of the future resurrection, according to the paradigm that we celebrate today, he himself will need the long-suffering and goodness of the Lord and consequently, renders mercy today, expecting a reward on that day. Gentlemen, you learned not to belittle me before the servants as if I

falsely praise this day; to remove grief from souls depressed by troubles as the Lord removed mortality from our body, to return honor to the disgraced, to fill the grieved with joy, to encourage the fallen in spirit, to lead those confined to the dark corners of your homes as if in a tomb to the light; to permit everyone to blossom in the beauty of the feast as a flower blossoms. If the birthday of an earthly king opens prisons, then certainly the victorious day of the resurrection of Christ will comfort those in mourning! O poor, on this day accept in love the One who nourishes you! O you weak and maimed, on this day greet the physician of your illness! The hope of your resurrection is hidden in Him, who induces you to be zealous about good deeds and to hate evil deeds; for with the destruction of ideas about the resurrection by everyone there will be left one prevailing idea: "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die (1 Cor. 15:32)".

In precisely the same way other Holy Fathers in their teaching on the day of Holy Pascha with special insistence call believers to the worthy celebration of the Resurrection of Christ. "This is the day of resurrection", teaches St. Gregory the Theologian, his propitious beginning. "Let us be illumined by the feast and let us embrace each other. 'Let us call 'brothers' even those that hate us' (Is. 66:5), so much the more who out of love have done something or have suffered. Let us all concede to the Resurrection, let us forgive each other ". "Let us bring gifts to the One Who suffered and the One Who rose for us. You may think that I speak about gold, or silver, or fabrics, or transparent and precious stones. These are earthly things, which pass and remain on earth, which always are more evil than loved servants, than the sovereign's servants. No, let us offer ourselves, our precious selves standing before God and to His most special self, let us offer to the Image created according to the image, let us learn His worthiness, let us believe the Prototype, let us comprehend the power of the mystery of the present feast, and for whom Christ died. Let us become like Christ, as Christ also became like us. Let us become like God for His sake, as He also became man for us. He accepted worse to give the best; he became poor in order to make us rich through His poverty; He accepted the appearance of a slave to receive freedom for us; He condescended, in order to raise us up; He was redeemed, in order to conquer for us; He endured infamy, in order to glorify us, He died in order to save; He rose in order to attract to Himself those who lie below in the sinful fall. Let whoever will give back everything, offer everything as a gift to Him Who has handed Himself over for us as the price of redemption. Nothing that he offers will be as equal as when he presents to Him his very self; who understands the power of the mystery and who does everything for Christ, as He did for us". "Today salvation is in the world, the world seen and unseen! Christ from the dead raises you with Him; Christ in His glory also raises you as He ascends; Christ from the tomb frees you from the bonds of sin; He opens the gate of Hades, He destroys death, He makes new the old

Adam who was laid aside: "therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17); the new has come".

"Be renewed today," teaches St. Epiphanius of Cyprus, "and renew a right spirit in our hearts in order to understand the mystery of the new and true feast; in order to satisfy us now with a truly heavenly gladness". "Our feast, if we want it to be pleasing and suitable to the Lord, should necessarily unite with the universal inspiration of the Church with God and the commemoration of our brothers who endure every need and poverty. For, if one member suffers, all members suffer with him. And so let us be co-sufferers with our brothers, who are our members; let us offer help to them: one by means of one's wealth, others by means of teaching and others by charity, and in general all by means of our prayers before God. Let us be, I implore you, in common prayer for everyone".

"Let us, therefore, solemnly celebrate", instructs St. John Chrysostom, "not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of purity and truth (1 Cor. 5:8)", believing in the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, the Trinity, One in essence and Undivided; believing in the resurrection and waiting for the Lord, again let us offer our wealth not with humility and meekness, but with glory and magnificence, with the support of the radiant Angels with trumpets, with fear and joy: with joy for the saints and the righteous, and with fear for the impious and the sinners". "Let us celebrate this magnificent feast of light, on which the Lord is risen! Let us celebrate Him brightly and together with the god-fearing: for the Lord is risen and the universe is risen together with Him".

"What benefit is there," says St. Ambrose of Milan, "in the celebration of Pascha when they only celebrate it externally, instead of celebrating it by its internal meaning, that is: they are not led out of Egypt by God and they do not pass over from works of darkness to works of light, "so that we might receive adoption as sons" (Gal. 4:5) in order to return from the foreign land to the heavenly fatherland? What benefit is there for those, if they also partake in the joy of the Paschal Lamb, but all their joy only revolves about Egyptian meat; if they further offer food and drink on their tables but do not elevate their minds or hearts; if they are tempted only by sensual pleasures without an idea at all about their own change for the better? What is to their benefit by this? They are worthy of every regret, and the Church prays for them to become wiser and for them to get on the right path to our Lord Jesus Christ, our eternal Pascha. I also ask you, brethren, that you celebrate Pascha worthy of its meaning, created in conformance to the exodus: that sinners celebrate it, by coming out of their sinful life to a life of good deeds; transforming themselves into 'accomplished' (Philip. 3:15) righteous men, that celebrate it, passing over from righteousness to greater righteousness, from piety to greater piety, from perfection to perfection, so that no one remains without passing over from the better to the still better, "forgetting what lies behind and straining

forward to what lies ahead" (Philip. 3:13). Celebrating Pascha in such a manner, we will be like true Christians worthily fulfilling their Pascha; in which through His grace, the Originator of the present feast, our Lord Jesus Christ Himself Who lives and reigns in timeless ages of ages, will help us."

*S. V. Bulgakov, **Handbook for Church Servers**, 2nd ed., 1274 pp. (Kharkov, 1900) pp. 0563-4
Translated by Archpriest Eugene D. Tarris © January 7, 2004. All rights reserved.*